

Caught in my throat; Clinging to my tongue by LoserLife592

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Summary:

"how cool would it be for steve to go from a relationship with a girl who said 'i love you' when she didn't mean it to a boy who would mean it and has the hardest time saying it."

Inspired by a post by flippyspoon on tumblr

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Author's Note:

- For [flippyspoon](#).

They're down by the quarry when it happens. The moon hangs full and heavy in the sky, and the night has a comfortable chill to it.

They're both lying on a blanket a few feet from the water's edge and close enough to the cars that they can hear the soft crooning of Bowie. It's well past midnight but neither of them really feel tired yet.

Steve's on his back staring up at the sky and mouthing the words while Billy lies tightly pressed against him, propped up on his elbow. Billy is clutching one of Steve's hands close, running his thumb over the lines on his palm and lacing their fingers together over and over again.

Eventually, when Billy finally glances up, he finds Steve already staring at him. His big brown eyes are soft and filled with something so sweet that Billy wants to kiss him senseless. So he does.

This—*them*—has been going on for a few months now, but every kiss still punches something out of Billy. Steve's mouth is soft and pliant, sweet and intoxicating. Billy can (and has—repeatedly) spend hours just holding Steve and fitting his lips perfectly over the other's. No lust or anything, just reveling in the constant high of knowing that *this* is something that Billy has now. Something he can actually *keep*.

They pull away from each other slowly, lips still brushing and dragging against each other. Billy cracks his eyes open and takes in Steve. His long lashes, his messy and fluffy hair, his bruised lips. Something in Billy aches and he sways back into Steve, covers his lips and body with his own again.

"Billy," Steve breaths in between sweet kisses. His hands are resting on the nape of Billy's neck, playing with the hair there. "*Billy*."

"Hmm," Billy hums, pulling back enough to look down at him.

Steve's eyes are half closed, his pupils are blown and, when Billy shifts so that he can bury a hand in Steve's hair, he leans into it. He looks so happy and at peace that Billy feels an endless amount of pride because *he did that*.

"Billy," Steve repeats, moving a hand so that he can cup Billy's jaw. His thumb brushes over his cheekbone before hovering over Billy's smiling lips. Steve flushes and grins dopily when he kisses it. "I love you."

It's said so softly, like he's sharing a secret. Steve stares up at Billy like he's never said anything he meant more in his life and Billy—

Billy freezes.

His eyes go wide, lips parting and mind blanking. All he can do is stare as the words bounce around endlessly in his head.

Steve loves him. Steve loves him. Steve loves him.

The moment stretches on and on and Billy still hasn't said anything—can't say anything. He can only watch.

Watch as Steve's smile slowly shrinks, as the peace and calm that surrounded him wilts, as his beautiful doe eyes lose a bit of their light before looking away.

"You," Steve starts, swallows and glances back at Billy for hardly a second before looking away again. "You don't have to say it back. It's okay if you're not—" He stops himself before he says *there yet* because he's suddenly not sure if Billy plans on being there at all. "If you don't feel the same."

Billy wants to—*needs to* fix this. Needs to pull Steve as close as physically possible, kiss every inch of his face and do everything in his power to wipe that look off of Steve's face.

But he *can't*.

Because he doesn't know how to say that the last (and only) person that said those words to him was his mother. Doesn't know how to say that he's only ever said those words to her and that the last time

he said it, it was because he was begging. Begging, crying and pleading for her to stay, to not leave him alone with his dad, for her not to go where he couldn't follow.

He doesn't know how to say how *scared* those words make him.

So he doesn't say anything at all.

"It's late," Steve says after a while, his hands have found their way back into his own space. "We should be heading back."

Billy nods and shifts back before standing up. Steve doesn't look at him as he gets to his feet, deals with the blanket, or during the short walk back to their parked cars. It's not until Steve's got his car started that he pauses and glances at Billy.

He bites his lip and glances away before looking back. He shuffles over to where Billy is standing beside the Camaro's driver's side, door still locked.

"Goodnight Billy." He hesitates for only a second before leaning in to press a quick kiss to Billy's cheek. Then he retreats to his car and drives off.

Billy watches him go and **hates** himself.

That was roughly two weeks ago and Steve is, well, he's not over it. Not really. Can't be when Billy is either avoiding him or staring at him with the most intense look that Steve has ever seen. Can't be when that moment keeps replaying itself over and over again in his head and he keeps telling himself how much of an *idiot* he was. A stupid idiot who keeps falling too hard and too quickly for people who don't love him.

But that's okay.

(It's really not. It's *unfair*. Because he loved Nancy so much and tried so hard to make her happy but it didn't work because she couldn't love him. And then there was Billy who pushed and pulled and gave

just as much as he took and—

And for once Steve just wants to be *loved*. Wants to put his heart in someone's hands and not have it be returned).

It's okay because it *will* be okay. They'll move past this, Steve knows it. Because they had to move past Billy punching Steve's face in, and how much of an asshole he would be to Steve and the kids, and how many things they couldn't really talk about yet—the abuse, the monsters.

They got past all of that; they made it work. Eventually, they'll get through this too.

(He had hoped for the same thing with Nancy after everything that went down last year. But that's neither here nor there).

It's okay.

It's late and someone is doing a very good job of trying to knock Steve's front door down. He laments the fact that his life is such a way that he immediately attributes the present situation with the world ending again.

Except when he pulls the door open, harried and a bit panicked, all he finds is a wild-eyed and disheveled Billy.

“What,” he starts, but Billy just pushes his way past Steve and heads straight for the liquor cabinet. Steve shuts the door and follows after him, stopping in between the kitchen and living room. “Billy, what are you doing here?”

Billy spins around, a bottle of whiskey in his hands that he unscrews as he speaks. “We need to talk.”

“Okay.” Steve says, wary as Billy downs a quarter of the bottle in one go. He pulls away, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and narrows his eyes at Steve.

“You,” he starts, gaze as dark and intense as it has been for the last two weeks. “You said that you—you said *those words*.”

Steve swallows, feels like something is twisting up inside of himself. “Yeah, I did.”

Billy’s jaw clenches and his grip tightens around the bottle’s neck. “And I didn’t say anything.”

Steve wraps his arms around himself, looks away and mutters, “No, you didn’t.” Then he clears his throat and looks back at Billy. “Don’t worry about it, alright? We haven’t been together that long so I shouldn’t’ve dropped that on you. You don’t—”

“Shut up.” Billy cuts him off, looking furious and taking an abortive step forward. “Shut up and don’t take those words back unless you don’t mean it.”

Steve blinks, lips parting as he stares in shock. “Of course I meant it.” He stills means it.

Billy nods and swallows down another mouthful. He hesitates, considers taking another drink before placing the bottle on the kitchen counter and looking Steve in the eye. “I can’t say them back.”

Something cold and lethal slowly spreads inside of Steve’s chest. His breath catches in his throat and it feels like his heart is trying give out on him.

(It’s just like with Nancy. Her alcohol-glazed eyes boring into him and calling him bullshit. Calling them—their ‘love’—bullshit. It’s all just **bullshit**).

Steve blinks away tears and looks down at the floor, digs his nails into his biceps so he doesn’t try to retreat. “Yeah,” he croaks, tries to clear his throat but that doesn’t help much. “Yeah I figured.”

“It’s not,” Billy breaths, hating himself even more as he watches Steve shrink into himself. Pacing forward he grabs Steve by the shoulders and tries to get him to look into his eyes. “It’s not for the reason you think it is.”

Steve lets out a breathless laugh even though there's nothing in this moment that he finds funny. He keeps his gaze down and lets a bitter smile twist his lips. "Billy, no, look—I *understand*—"

"No, you *don't*." His grip on Steve's shoulders tighten and he feels triumphant for about a second when brown eyes finally meet his in surprise. "You don't because you, you're the best thing to *ever* happen to me. And I'm pretty sure it'll kill me if I ever lose you."

Wide brown eyes are locked on Billy's face, stunned by the confession. He opens and closes his mouth, trying to find something to say. "Billy—"

"But," Billy keeps going, eyes filled with fire and voice strained. "I—I can't say those *words*."

Billy's hands are gripping Steve so tightly that he's sure there'll be bruises. He's staring at the brunette like it's all he can do to stop him pacing or ripping his own hair out.

"And," he continues, "I don't know when, or if, I'll be able to say them. But I don't want you ever thinking that I—that I don't—" Blue eyes narrow dangerously and Billy lets go to furiously scrub at his face. He lets out a loud, frustrated growl, teeth bared like he's gearing up for a fight.

Steve takes a steadying breath to stop himself from swaying or collapsing. God he'd been so *scared*. But Billy always has a way of pulling the rug out from under him when he least expects it. He runs a hand through his hair and down his face before reaching out. Because Billy is a man of action, functions on instinct and violence better than on words and feelings. He must've been scraping his insides raw and empty looking for a way to get this all out.

"Billy," he says carefully, laying a hand on the other's wrist. "It's okay. You don't have to say anymore. I don't care as long as you mean it." And he really doesn't. Billy's there when Steve can't sleep, when Steve worries, when Steve needs something but doesn't know what. Billy *loves* him. That's more than Steve could've asked for.

Billy closes his eyes and moves his hands away from his face. He lets

Steve cup his face in his hands and press comforting kisses to his cheeks, eyes, forehead, then his lips. He breathes in and out a few times as he melts into Steve's affection. Lets his tenderness and love wash over Billy and soothe the hurricane in his head. After a few moments, he opens his eyes.

Steve's eyes are filled with love and reassurance. They're so warm and beautiful and Billy knows that Steve believes him. Steve *knows*. There isn't anything else he needs to add as long as Steve knows.

Except—yes there is. And Billy knows that if he doesn't get it out now, he never might. And he can't let that happen.

He takes a deep breath, steels himself for the last leg of this marathon, and reaches into his pocket.

The necklace he wears isn't all that special. Just something he got on the side of the road a few weeks before moving to Hawkins. But the ring that he slid onto it before driving over—that's a different story. It's a small metal band with an even smaller diamond on it. The kind of ring you'd see someone wearing and think, "Really? What a cheapskate". His mom had given it to him before she died. His dad hadn't been the one who'd given to her.

Billy slips the necklace over Steve's head and fusses with how it settles against his chest. Doesn't quite meet his eyes but means every word he says next.

"I'd spend the rest of my life with you if you'd let me."

It feels like all the oxygen in the world suddenly vanishes and Steve's the only one that notices. Billy's still in front of him fidgeting with the necklace and ring (good god an actual *ring*—), and Steve feels like he's about to pass out.

For a long moment, nothing happens. But then Steve's hands slowly slip from Billy's face. They slide down and move until they're wrapping around Billy's. Both of them holding onto the ring. It's only then that Billy looks up at Steve.

"I love you." Steve chokes out around the lump in his throat. His eyes

are shining. All Billy can do is dive in to press their lips together.
That's more than enough.

Author's Note:

I suck at endings.